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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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31.05.2022

Shanghai emerges out of lockdown after beating back Omicron

Shanghai, a city of 26 million inhabitants and China's commercial hub, has beaten back the Omicron variant in just two months with fewer than 600 deaths. The infrastructure and economy of the metropolis are intact, and steps are being taken now to lift the lockdown. Health and city officials announced Saturday they intend to formally end its lockdown after Wednesday, having already relaxed restrictions last week.

Meanwhile, Europe and the US have repeatedly lied to their population that little could be done against the contagious variant and had to go it alone as the opening of the economy essentially remains a priority. These lies have been accompanied by a scurrilous slander campaign against China, portraying its highly successful and widely popular Zero-COVID policy as an unacceptable infringement on the rights of the people.

US President Joe Biden joined the chorus last week, dismissing China's pandemic policy as a failure while hailing India's disastrous results as a triumph of democracy.

To put Biden's blatant lie into context, China and India have comparable populations of over 1.4 billion people each. India's official COVID death count is nearing 525,000, while China's is just over 5,000, a hundred times less.

The disparity is actually even more dramatic. According to the World Health Organization's (WHO) recent report on global excess deaths from January 2020 to

December 2021, a more accurate measure of the impact of the pandemic, India suffered 4.74 million excess deaths, the most of any country.

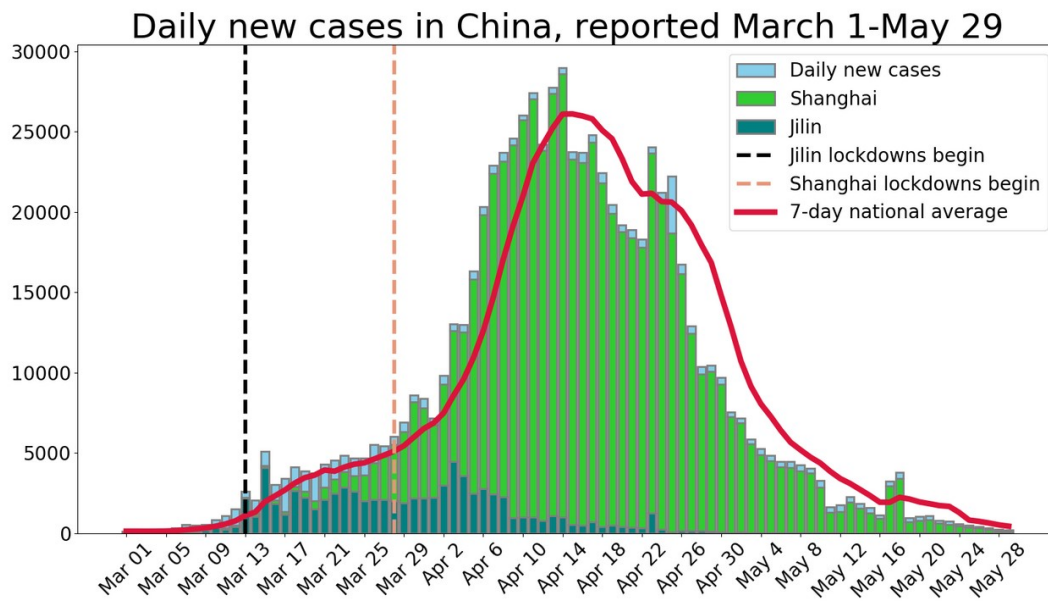
During the same period, China experienced *fewer* deaths than would have been predicted, with a figure of *negative* 52,000 excess deaths. The measures taken to suppress the COVID-19 pandemic actually had a spillover effect in reducing deaths from other causes as well.

It also bears comparing the US and China on the state of the COVID pandemic considering Biden's malicious statement. Since the pandemic, the US has reported over a million COVID deaths, with a population 4.2 times smaller than China's. On a per capita rate, the "leader of the free world" killed one in every 330 of its own citizens. China's per capita rate was an infinitesimal one in every 250,000 people.

At last count, the total number of COVID deaths in "autocratic" China has reached 5,226 across 31 provincial-level regions, far below even Hong Kong's foray with Omicron that claimed over 9,000 lives with just 7.5 million people.

The Omicron surge in China commenced at the beginning of March. While daily infections were quickly stabilized in the northern province of Jilin, the delay in initiating strict measures in Shanghai led to an ever-accelerating community transmission there. On March 27, the spreading infections in the metropolis prompted a phased lockdown that placed the entire region into strict isolation.

Despite initial missteps and confusion stemming from a never-before-initiated and massive public health effort, the process of mass testing, contact tracing, isolation and quarantining, including administering medical care to those infected, within little more than two months, the tide of infections was reversed.



The COVID trendline in China since March 1. (Source: WSWS media)

After reaching a peak in the seven-day average of 26,109 daily cases on April 15, the seven-day average has declined to a low of 426 cases per day. According to the National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China, the country reported 293 new COVID cases yesterday, of which 211 were asymptomatic and 82 symptomatic. Seventy-eight of these cases were imported, leaving 215 cases of local transmission.

In Shanghai, the epicenter of the Omicron outbreak in mainland China, there were only 122 COVID cases reported over the last 24 hours. There were no reported deaths yesterday, leaving the total COVID deaths in Shanghai at 591.

By comparison, the US registered close to 110,000 COVID cases yesterday. However, given the near-complete dismantling of the COVID trackers across most states, these numbers are a gross undercounting. Despite the persistence of media discussion about the pandemic in the past tense, the seven-day average of deaths has up-ticked to over 370 per day, meaning more Americans will die in two days during the supposed lull in cases than Chinese citizens died in three months of an outbreak. In the time it has taken China to beat back COVID, with barely 600 deaths, another 50,000 Americans died from the disease.

Though the transition to normal operations in Shanghai comes at a deliberate pace, people are allowed out of their homes and local businesses are reopening. Most of the population

is currently living in the lowest risk “prevention” category, meaning no cases have been detected in over two weeks.

From June 1, the city is loosening its PCR testing requirements from 48 hours to 72 hours for using public transportation or entry into public buildings. For those planning to leave the city, a PCR test within 48 hours is required, followed by a rapid antigen test within 24 hours, and entry into the city needs a PCR test within 48 hours.

According to Wu Huanyu, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Center for Disease Control and Prevention, when a community-acquired infection is detected, contact tracers proceed to the site and investigate close and secondary contacts to contain the spread and the resurgence. Additionally, these cases are gene sequenced to determine the origin of the COVID infection.

According to the city publication, *Shine*, “Nearly 1,700 key production companies, 450 financial institutions, and 580 foreign trade companies have restored operations in Pudong. A total of 660 supermarkets and 41 wet markets have reopened, along with landmark shopping malls such as the Taikoo Li Qiantan and 1 Yaohan, which have been receiving customers. All bus lines within Pudong will be restored from Monday, along with all community service centers.”

The capital city of Beijing responded quickly to the April 22 outbreak that threatened the city. Reuters reported yesterday that a government spokesman said during a recent news conference that the outbreak has been brought “effectively under control” without having to resort to a city-wide lockdown.

In the eight of Beijing’s 16 districts, with zero community cases for seven consecutive days, shopping malls, libraries, museums, theaters and gyms were opened on Sunday. Public transportation will resume in three districts, including the largest, Chaoyang. Indoor dining remains banned city-wide.

If the counterfactual outcome were posed, a recent peer-reviewed study from Shanghai’s Fudan University, published in the journal *Nature Medicine*, found that if China abandoned its Zero-COVID policy, Omicron would lead to 112 million symptomatic cases within six months, 5.1 million hospital admissions, and 1.6 million deaths.

Besides the complete overwhelming of their health systems, such an approach would have dire long-term consequences that include subjugating millions more to Long COVID and the possible emergence of new virulent strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The financial press has not even discussed the question of the impact on the global economy if China abandoned Zero-COVID. The current attempts to blame China for the world's economic downturn are purely political. If the virus were allowed to spread without any public health measures to stem the tide of infections, the results would be catastrophic both to the population and to the world's economy.

With new waves of infections being forecast, the ongoing toll of infections and reinfections on the population's health would have untold consequences that would last for generations. Neither China nor any other country can suppress a global pandemic. Only the international working class can enforce a policy of global Zero-COVID, disregarding all the claims of corporate profit and "national security" that dictate the policies of all capitalist states.

World Socialist 30.05.2022